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THE PEOPLE AND THEIR HABITAT

The telegraph line which runs from Cuiabá, the capital of Mato Grosso, to Porto Velho on the Madeira River has created a narrow corridor of the known through the vast unknown stretches of northwestern Mato Grosso. Along this line the Government has established telegraph stations manned by telegraph operators, many of whom are Paresí Indians. A makeshift road, over which trucks can travel, follows the line a few miles past Utiarity to Burity; beyond this the road is no more than a trail along which men ride on horseback and goods are transported by pack oxen. At Vilhena there is an army airfield.

Since 1912, when the line was completed, this corridor has been the highway of men who have sought rubber, diamonds, gold, and Indian souls. No permanent settlements of farmers or stockmen, as yet, occupy this vast hinterland. The rubber concessioner, usually a man from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, or Cuiabá with sufficient funds to buy a truck or two, lays claim to a stretch of "galeria" forest, builds a camp along the road, hires a number of tappers, and goes into business. Each underpaid tapper works an area of trees, bringing his rubber to camp on his back or more rarely on oxback. Food must be brought in from Cuiabá, and as supplies, at best, are precarious, any delay in truck transportation brings scurvy and starvation. Eventually the workers drift away, some it is said dying on the way, and the operation ceases. During the last war the United States Government, through the Rubber Reserve, enabled rubber operations to expand. Good camps were established and the road improved. Today, however, the camps and the road are deteriorating, leaving the field to the shoe-string operator with his second-hand truck. The operations of the gold and diamond miners are still more uncertain. In small groups they enter the area, their scanty supplies carried on oxen and mules. Men unfamiliar with the semiarid wastes easily miss the areas where fodder and water can be obtained, the pack animals die and the stranded men are left to find their way out the best they can. At Utiarity I met a miner who was waiting for food supplies from Cuiabá. He had four oxen and two

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